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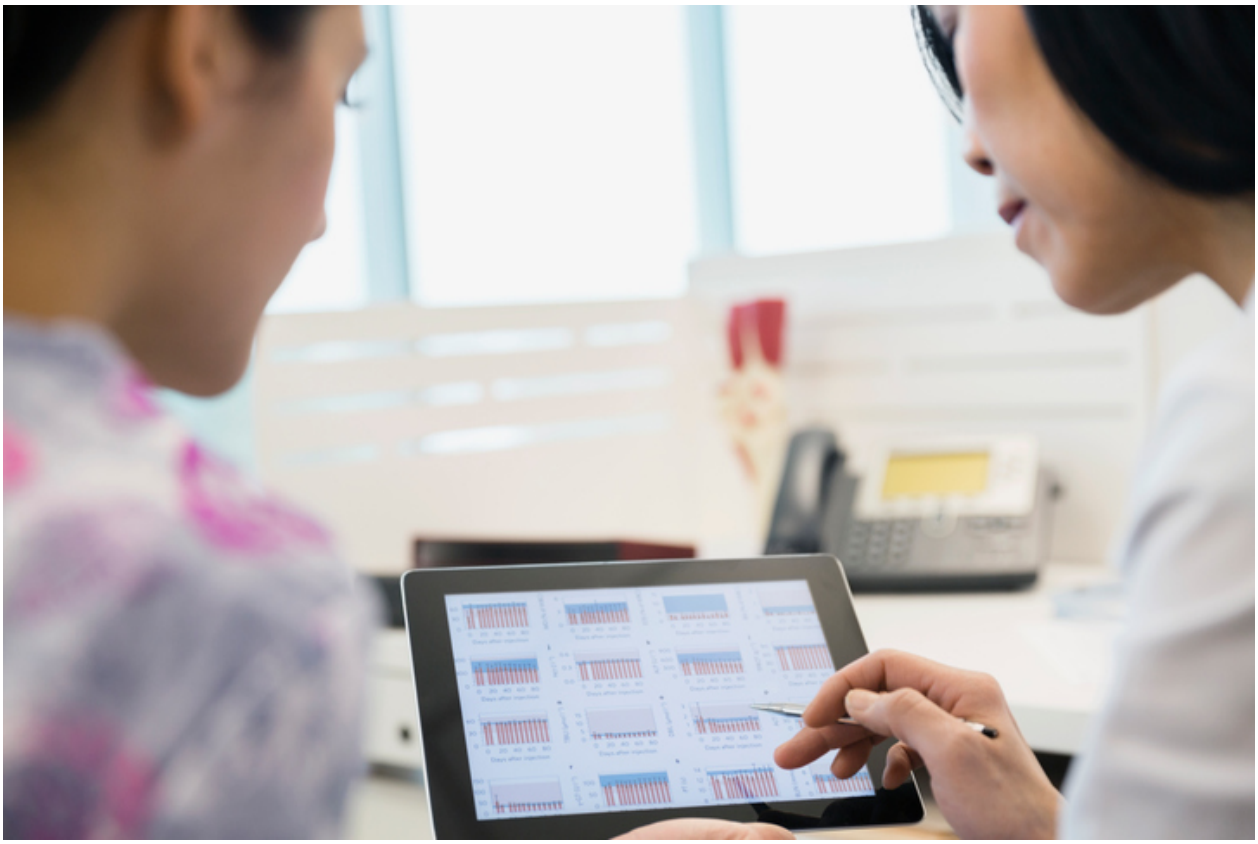
# Connected care and cardiovascular disease: why we need to get to the heart of the problem

By 2025, the World Heart Federation has pledged to help reduce premature mortality caused by cardiovascular disease (CVD) by 25%. It's a big goal but, if we learn to employ connected care technology in the right way, it's also an achievable one.

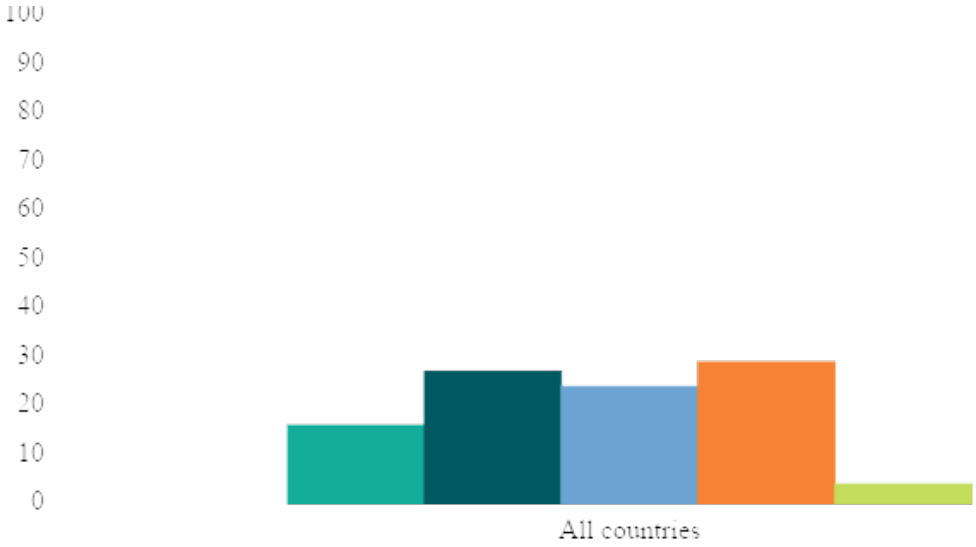


## What does 'the right way' actually mean with connected technology?

The answer is inevitably complex and what is 'right' varies per country, per region and per demographic. The one aspect that applies across the board though is that the 'right way' will be the way that not only uses connected care technology, but that also uses it to solve specific problems. The solution will first look at the 'bottleneck' on the cardiovascular management cascade and then at how connected care technology can overcome it, rather than simply embracing connected care as a cure-all.

## Making data-sharing more accessible

Currently, one common problem is that although a lot of technology-related initiatives exist, connected care technology has yet to find a useful and reliable way to harness or share the data it collects. One of the main barriers for implementing connected technology into the treatment of CVD is the sheer volume of data it would present and that data not necessarily translating into something actionable for HCPs. The 2016 Future Health Index (FHI) report confirms this point, with a majority of patients stating they track some data but don't know how to share it with their healthcare provider, and healthcare providers mirroring these concerns by saying that even when they receive data from patients, they are unsure how to integrate that data with the information they already have.




However, we are moving in the right direction – studies have shown that mHealth (mobile health) can be useful to improve management of patients with heart attack, atrial fibrillation and other CVD conditions.

## Endorsing the technology

How data is collected, evaluated and presented is a key issue, and one that technology now needs to remedy. First steps will involve streamlining approval of connected care devices and apps, of which there are hundreds targeted at CVD patients. Some are validated at the moment, but some are not, and this makes it hard for CVD patients and clinicians to really trust what the devices and apps are saying. While it is a positive thing that technology is advancing so fast, it only counts if the quality of it keeps up.

## Treating 'silent' symptoms

Where connected care can really come into its own – particularly in heart health – is in the treatment of 'silent symptoms' of cardiology. If someone is overweight, for example, you don't need connected data to tell you that, or to tell you that the solution is to eat more healthily and lose weight. But what about heart rate? What about blood pressure? Creating connected technology that can track the hidden elements and make them visible is what will change behavior and promote healthier living.

## Connecting those who really need it

Of course, these developments will only have real effect in places where healthcare is already integrated and where connected care is already ingrained. In regions where access to healthcare is lacking – either from inadequate infrastructure, or from geography (eg, rural areas) – connected technology needs to bring more than just tweaks; it needs to bring radical changes.

There are many ongoing projects where technology aims to overcome limited resources. For example:

where there are not enough human resources to manage health conditions like hypertension and diabetes, technology has an important role to play; and where there are not enough specialists, connected care technology can help spread their expertise to a much wider population.

For treating chronic conditions like CVD, there is a huge potential for connected technology to bring expertise to populations that might otherwise struggle to reach it – and it's exciting to see initiatives like 'Be Healthy, Be Mobile', launched in 2014 by the World Health Organization, supporting this ideal.

## Looking ahead

Technology can be a global solution, but it must be locally adapted. Certainly, connected care technology can, and will, have a huge impact on all of healthcare, but it needs to make sure it is solving concrete problems.

In the future technology might identify early signs of CVD, and help to support patients' medical management (e.g. without patients having to go to health care facilities where resources are limited).

The task of reducing premature mortality caused by CVD by 2025 starts with us not only looking at how we reach the end goal, but also at how we can take one step – and one roadblock – at a time. Connected care could be an important step in the right direction.

This article was co-written by Rachel Shaw.

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